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'COME AND SEE.'

OR

THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO DREAD THE SENTIMENTS OF OTHER CHRISTIANS.

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'COME AND SEE.'

To have prejudice is not a crime, it is an infirmity; but to allow ourselves to be governed by prejudice in our actions, judgments, and feelings to others, is no better than a sin. When Nathanael asked with surprise, if it was possible that anything good should proceed from Nazareth, Philip said, 'Come and see.' Now, if he had refused to take the proper means to satisfy his own mind upon the subject, he would have done perpetual injustice to Him who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, and would have lost himself a privilege, which he would not afterwards have surrendered for worlds. He acted like a man who wished, not to indulge his prejudice, but to know the truth, whatever it might be; and as soon as he went and saw, he was convinced that his prejudices were unfounded and unworthy. It would not, however, be possible to give the name of good to one who stands out in his prejudices; for every one is bound to keep his mind always open to light, argument, and conviction; he is bound to prove all things, for till he has done so, he has no security that he is holding fast what is good.

Let us apply the words of Philip to the faith which most of us profess. Though the public feeling is milder than it was, that faith is still spoken against; some regard it with anger and scorn, others with dislike and dread. Now it seems to us to be the duty of those who have such feelings, to ascertain whether there is reason or not to indulge them. How do they know what our opinions are? They ought at least to know what they condemn. Let them 'come and see' whether we exalt human reason above revelation — whether we degrade and dishonor the Son of God—whether we make light of human sin — whether we teach that man's works alone will save him — whether we remove all the fears of future retribution. If they come and see that it is so, then let them bear testimony against us, and they may do it with a good conscience; but if they condemn without a hearing, if they judge our sentiments from the unfriendly representations of others, when they can learn what they are from the best authority, they take a course which it is not easy to reconcile with a right sense of duty.

But some one may tell us, that we speak of the sentiments of other sects, and ask us how we are acquainted with them? We answer that we hear them preached, and advise others to go at times to hear them. If any one is not edified by our preaching, we advise him to go where he can find more acceptable instructions. Moreover, we can learn their sentiments from their creeds and confessions; but we have no creed except the Scriptures, and they cannot learn what construction we put upon the Scriptures, except from ourselves. It is true, they might learn from our writings; but there

is the same aversion to reading our writings, as to hearing our preachers; so that many unfortunately cut themselves off from every opportunity of ever knowing what we believe and profess; and thus, we sometimes find, that those who think they are condemning our sentiments, are condemning sentiments, which we do not believe any more than they; so that we find it necessary to say to them, 'come and see' what those sentiments are, which you condemn as false and ruinous to the soul.

They say that we exalt human reason above the revelation of God. Come and see if it is so. We use our reason to discover what is taught in the Scriptures. There are parts of those writings, which require attention and study to learn their meaning; and in making that inquiry, we use our reason — in other words, we use our minds, not to judge truths which we find taught, but simply to learn what *is* taught by the inspiration of God. Every other sect with which we are acquainted, does precisely the same thing; every sect has its volumes of interpretation, its aids to the right understanding of the scriptures, and invites its followers to use their reason — to examine, compare, and judge — to deliberate long and carefully, in order to ascertain the meaning of the oracles of God. So far, no one can say, that we forget the right province of human reason, or exalt its authority too high. But if they say, that we ever set the conclusions of our reason against the authority of revelation, or to use the common phrase, set reason above revelation, let them come and see; it is a serious charge, and before they bring it against us, they ought to be sure that it is true. If

they come, they will see that we treat the authority of revelation as final and supreme. We bring every doctrine and every duty to the test of scripture; the reason of our rejecting certain doctrines, is, that we cannot find them taught in the Bible; if we did, we should embrace and avow them, as readily as we now disown and cast them away. No man can point to any sentiments which we have rejected, because they are opposed to our reason merely; if we reject them, it is because we think they are not taught of God.

Those who come and see, will find that this charge cannot possibly be true. We cannot exalt reason against revelation, because they always agree; they never are in the least opposed to each other. Every doctrine that we find in the scriptures is a reasonable one — every duty a reasonable service; there is nothing unreasonable in the instructions and demands of christianity. When reason and revelation thus always and in every respect coincide in their testimony, how can it be said that we accept the evidence of one in preference to that of the other? But it is easy to see whence this charge arose. We do not find in the scriptures the same doctrines which some other christians find in the scriptures; our reason teaches us that we must believe what *we* find, and not what *they* find; as we act upon our own responsibility, we must act upon our own conviction. Thus, our reason requires us to reject what they call the doctrines of the gospel, simply because we believe that there are not such doctrines in the gospel. In all this, we bow to the authority of the word of God; we exalt reason no higher than other christians. Their reason teaches them to trust their own interpretation in

preference to ours; our reason teaches us also to read and judge for ourselves; their reason is opposed to revelation as we see and explain it; our reason is opposed to revelation as they see and explain it; but this does not give any right to either party, to charge the other with setting its own reason above the authority of God. It is delightful to us to discover and declare, how entirely the doctrines and duties of Christianity are approved by the judgment of every deliberate mind; and we consider it our duty to show to others, that it is their reasonable service to present themselves a living sacrifice to God.

To come to the subject of our doctrines; let those who think our sentiments false and dangerous, come and see what we teach of God. We do not, we confess, teach that God exists in three persons; we do not, however, reject that doctrine merely because it is a mystery, but because it is not taught in the scriptures. How will those who believe it, account for the fact, that it is no where so stated in the scriptures that they can even give their belief on the subject in scripture words? Would it not be strange, that such a doctrine should be taught only in doubtful and obscure intimations, if it were among the essential truths of the gospel? And how happens it that our Saviour, who doubtless best knew his own nature, should never, so far as appears by the evangelists, have taught this doctrine to his disciples? He constantly speaks of himself as receiving all things from his Father; the whole impression given by what he says of himself, is fully expressed in the words, 'My Father is greater than I;' and when he says, 'I and my Father are one,' he prays, as if in explanation, for

his disciples, 'that they and their Father may be one, *even as we are one.*' The only thing approaching to a statement of this doctrine, which any one professes to find in his words, is in the form of baptism, 'in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' But all Christians believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; what resemblance does this bear to the doctrine, that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God? and yet these are not three Gods, but one God. We reject that doctrine because we cannot find it in the scriptures.

There are other doctrines with respect to the divine character, which we do not preach for the same reason; because we do not find them in the scripture. We do not preach that any individuals are elected to eternal happiness or eternal woe. The election spoken of in scripture, is the election of a nation, like the Jews, or of a body of men like the Christians, to enjoy certain privileges which are not given to the rest of the world. To elect men in this way, to superior privileges, is not unjust, because there is after death the judgment, and to whom much is given, of him shall much be required. But to elect them to eternal life or eternal woe, would not be just, because after that there could be no retribution. The rewards of conduct and character never could be impartially awarded, and a perpetual inequality would remain in the condition and destinies of men, such as cannot exist forever under the government of a just God; he allows the bad to prosper, and the good to suffer in the world, for the sake of trial and improvement, but the retribution will make all things right at last. These privileges to which we are sometimes

elected in this world, are lent, not given; they are trusts, not favors; and they who enjoy them, must answer for the use or abuse of every one. That the Jews were an elected people, or that the Christians are an elected people, has no respect whatever to final salvation, and though Christians, like St. Paul, call themselves elect of God, let them like him, fear and labor, lest they be cast away at last. Those who come and see will find that we preach the election of Christians, and the election of character, but not the election of individuals to eternal life. No human ingenuity can give any reason, to show the use or advantage of preaching to men that they are under a destiny which was fixed before they were born. One thing is certain; if that destiny can be altered, it is not fixed; and if it is fixed, it cannot be altered. If it is fixed, the elect to eternal life have nothing to do, nor to dread; and those not elected, cannot gain a hope of heaven, by all that they can do. This doctrine would destroy at once all the hopes and fears of religion, by changing hope into presumptuous assurance, and the fears of the guilty into despair.

Those who come and see, will find that we represent God as sending his Son to reconcile men to each other and to Him. They will not find, that we speak as some others do of the divine wrath and vengeance; we do not believe that such passions can reside in the Almighty; and therefore we cannot suppose, that it was the object of our Savior's coming to reconcile God to us. He never has been unfriendly to us; he has always been kind, forbearing, forgiving, and I may say affectionate to us; it was because 'he so loved the

world that he gave his only begotten Son.' What was needed was, to reconcile men to him; to reconcile them to his character, his providence, his commands and their own duty. Since the enmity is all on the side of man, and God is so invariably merciful that he bears the name of Love, we cannot admit for a moment that the wrath of the Father required to be quenched by the blood of his Son. Our Savior died, and died for men, it is true; but it was man that murdered him; he was destroyed by the hands and the passions of men; it was the love, the unchanging love of God, which gave such power to his death. Through him 'we have received the atonement;' he has opened the way for our reconciliation with God.

Those who come and see, will find that we represent God as a Father; we delight in that resemblance and comparison, not only because it recommends him to our confidence and love, but because it explains to us all that we need and desire to know; we all know what a father is, and what may be expected from a father. A human father is preparing his children for mature and active life; he gives them all the means of improvement and instruction, and assures them that if they waste the spring tide of existence, they will be miserable; if they improve it aright, they will be respectable and happy. In the same way our heavenly Father is preparing his children for the maturer years of the soul. The world is not the place where our lives are to be passed; this life is but the childhood, the preparing time of existence; God gives us the means of improvement here, and assures us that our future destiny shall depend upon the characters we form. Shall a son who becomes

dishonored by his vices, blame his father for his fall? His father did all for him that he could; from the nature of the case, no compulsion — nothing but moral power could be exerted. Shall the soul that perishes, upbraid its heavenly Father with its doom? he exerted upon it all the means and influences to make it holy, which its nature would admit; it *would not be holy*, and therefore *could not be happy*. Shall the guilty say that God, if he is merciful, might then have made it good? There is no such thing as *making good:* goodness is not goodness, unless it is a voluntary thing; it must be the choice and consent of our own hearts, or it is nothing. When we call our God then by the endearing name of Father, besides that the name inspires confidence and love, it teaches us how much we have reason to ask or hope from him, and what weight of obligation rests upon our own souls. He gives us ample power, he sets before us ample inducements, to form the christian character; if we need more aid, he will give it to those who ask it in prayer. He is the guide and guardian of our way; every thing we enjoy in this world or hope for in another, proceeds from his never weary love. His is the kingdom; he is the only sovereign of the soul; his is the power; we can do nothing, but what he enables us to do; his is the glory; he has declared that he will not give it to another; therefore we ascribe the kingdom, the power, and the glory to God alone.

But they say that by representing God as thus forbearing, kind and gracious, we remove all religious fears. Let them come and see. They will find, that there are two kinds of fear. If of two human parents

one is kind and affectionate, the other stern and severe, a child will fear the presence and person of the latter, while he cares little for his displeasure; he will be unwilling to come near him; he will fear the presence of such a parent, as a restraint and burden. On the other hand, the child of a kind parent will love his father's presence, and will treat him with confidence and affection; without fearing his person, he will fear nothing so much as his displeasure. The distinction between fearing the divine person, and fearing the divine displeasure, is not made as it should be. There are some christians, who by representing God as severe and stern, make their followers afraid of *Him*, without inspiring in them the least fear of his displeasure. We think that ours is a more excellent way. By holding up the divine character to the admiration and love of men; by endeavoring to remove that dread of God's presence, which prevents all free and happy communion with him; by showing that he deals with men like a Father, with even more than the tenderness of human affection, we believe that we inspire and increase the fear of the divine displeasure, which in our view, is the only fear which religion aims to awaken. Those who come and see, will find that while we do endeavor to remove such fears as prevent men from going boldly to the throne of grace, and casting their care on their God, we do, by the very same exertion, if we succeed in it, make them fear the divine displeasure more than any thing beside; this is the case with those who seriously and conscientiously embrace our opinions; but in our sect, as well as every other, there are those who for various reasons, wear its colors and range themselves in its lines, while

they do not know its principles, do not feel its spirit, and therefore will not be taken by any just observer as examples of the effect of our faith upon the life and heart.

Secondly, let them come and see what we teach of Jesus Christ.

If they ask of some persons of other sects, what are our sentiments with respect to the Saviour, they will be told, that we represent Jesus Christ as a mere common man. Now it is reasonable to ask, why they believe this is true? Have they ever heard it declared by one of our number? No! they have received that impression from those, who have a strong dislike to our sentiments, and who, like themselves, have never taken pains to ascertain whether it is true. Ask them why they charge us with saying that he is no more than man, they will offer no evidence of the fact, but will simply reply, that we must necessarily represent him as nothing more than man, if we will not allow that he is God. This, it will be observed, is their assertion, not ours; and yet on the strength of this assertion, they charge us with preaching a doctrine, which no man ever heard us preach — which no man knows that we believe; they take those sentiments which they *think it likely* that we believe; not what *they have ascertained* that we believe, nor what they have heard us express. Thus they accuse, try, and condemn us, with no better evidence than suspicion.

Let them come and see; they will hear our sentiments preached without reserve; let them see if this is among them. They will find that we represent that wonderful being as inferior to the Father, and to the

Father alone. We believe the Father to be one being and the Son another; they are one, only as 'he that planteth and watereth are one.' They will find, that we represent Jesus Christ as far exalted above the children of men, — fitted alike in his nature, character and powers, to be the Saviour, Mediator, and Judge of the world. Those who have made this charge against us, will make it still; it was founded upon nothing we have ever said, and therefore nothing that we can say, will induce them to retract it. But to those who are willing to hear, we repeat, that our doctrine is simply this, that Jesus Christ was inferior to the Father, and to the Father alone; of all beings, with one exception, he is by far the most exalted. While we believe in the divinity of his character, of his office, and his power, — in the divinity of his actions and his words, we ought not to be charged with making him a mere common man, simply for saying that he is a being distinct from and inferior to the Almighty. We cannot read the words, 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent,' without the conviction, that the beings there named, are entirely distinct from each other; nor can we feel as if it were a crime to say in the very words of inspiration, 'to us there is but one God, the Father.'

But they say that our faith deprives the world of an all-sufficient Saviour. If they will come, they will see that we do not, as they imagine, represent Jesus Christ as a man, attempting to save the world by merely human power. He said, 'all power is given unto me, in heaven and earth;' such is the power which resides in his hands, and which he employs for the salvation of

men; let those who say that this is sufficient, say what greater power can there be? Is it thought dishonorable to the Saviour, to say that 'all things were *delivered* unto him by the Father?' — will that power be less effectual, because God gave it, than if it had been his own? If, as he said, he could of himself do nothing, still, when armed with the power of God, he can do all that is needed for the salvation of men. 'The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.' The divine power remains the same; it can be no greater if there are three persons in the Godhead; it can be no less if there is but one; no views of religion can represent it as more than infinite; none can make it less; and when Jesus Christ comes to us in his Father's name, we feel as much confidence in his power to aid us, as if he acted on his own authority and employed his own power. Let them no longer complain that we deprive men of an all-sufficient Saviour; let them not say of us again, 'they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him;' let them remember that she who made the complaint, if she had understood the scripture, would not have looked for him there. No one had taken her Lord away, but she was seeking him where he was not to be found; and Jesus was standing by her, at the very moment when she was lamenting him as lost forever.

Neither will they find that when we say that the Father is superior to the Son, we deprive the Son of that reverence, gratitude and love that should be paid him, and that are paid him by every sincere Christian, whatever name he bears. Though he was not God, it is not the less true, that he did all that could be done for

us; he endured all that nature could bear for us; he gave up all that could be sacrificed for us; for us he submitted to the humiliation, dishonor and suffering of life; for us he died in agony, when he had finished the work that was given him to do. Does any one deny that he endured the cross, — that his spirit gushed forth in blood? does any one deny that he suffered this anguish of body and mind, which we tremble to think of, for our salvation? does any one say that his death was not needed, or that the Lamb of God had no power in his death to take away the sin of the world? If any believe that we deny these things, let them come; let them join with us to remember that Friend, whose love was stronger than death; let them unite in our devotions, and they will not say again that we hold the services, the sufferings, or the death of our Master in light esteem: they will find ours joined with the thousand voices, which say, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and glory and blessing;' they will not find us silent, when all that are in heaven and earth say, 'Blessing and honor, and glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.'

Still they say, that our faith respecting the Saviour is a cold and dreary system, which chills all the religious affections, and spreads a sort of winter over the soul. Our faith believes in God the Father, in Jesus Christ the Saviour, in eternity, in retribution; how can it be a cold system, so long as thoughts like these have power to warm the soul? Let those who say this, come; they will see that our system is not colder to them, than

theirs is to us. If they read our writings and hear our preaching with a strong feeling of dislike and dread, how can it be otherwise than cold to them? Nothing that men dislike and disbelieve, ever has power to warm the heart; so that when they call our faith cold and dreary, they simply mean that they do not believe it; and they are no judges of its effect on those who do believe it. Do they say that we are cold? We confess that it is so; we lament that so little warm and pure religious affection appears in any party; we see enough fires of religious passion burning; we see men zealous enough, in advancing the influence and interests of their own party; we see them constant enough in services of devotion, which they themselves have made; but we see but little anywhere, of that pure, warm, peaceful and benevolent feeling, which christianity labors to inspire. And one reason of this deficiency seems to be, that where religious passions prevail, they keep down and destroy religious feelings; the loud and violent passion, and the gentle and fervent feeling, cannot live together — cannot be inmates of the same breast. We will not say that the faith of other christians is cold, because we are no judges of its effects on them; every faith is cold to the breast that does not give it a friendly welcome; nor will we allow that others are any judges of the effect of our sentiments, till they believe them, love them, apply them to their lives, and in that way make trial of their power.

Having stated that it is the duty of those who dislike our sentiments with respect to God and the Saviour to ascertain what our sentiments really are before they

condemn, we now proceed to our opinions respecting the character, duty and destiny of man.

They say that our preaching on this subject is moral preaching. This is thought to be a reproach; but before they condemn us, let them come and see what this morality is, which is considered so dangerous to the soul. The morality which we preach and hear, is not heathen morality — not our duty, as it is understood by those who never have been enlightened by the gospel; not merely the duties we owe to society, of justice, kindness and truth; not merely the duties we owe ourselves, of prudence, care and self-improvement; it includes also in its broad circle, the duties of love, confidence, heavenly mindedness and prayer, which we owe to our Father in heaven. Thus this preaching covers the whole ground of christian duty, including not only actions, but the principles and feelings that govern human actions. If it concerned itself with conduct only, there might be some reason for saying, that, weighed in the balances it would be found wanting; for the heart is the source of holiness as well as of sin; and our religion teaches us to look to the heart as the fountain head, and when it is corrupt, to cast in a branch from the tree of life to heal the bitter waters. But at the same time our religion teaches us that the deeds are essential, because they show the state of the heart; so essential that 'God shall render to every man according to his deeds;' so essential, that 'they that have done good shall come to the resurrection of life;' so essential, that our Saviour, in his sermon on the mount, that perfect summary of our religion, said, without one word of what are now called essential doctrines,

'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.'

But it is said that the word morality is not commonly thought to include so much; it is applied to men of regular habits and decent conduct, who neither have, or pretend to have religious feelings; therefore to call our preaching moral, gives the impression that it is not serious, deep-toned nor awakening. It certainly does; but who calls it moral preaching? If *we* gave it that name, it would be a different thing; but we do not; that name is given by those who dislike our sentiments; it is given in reproach; it gives *their* impression, no doubt, but it is not a correct impression; we will not say that we preach morality, because we know it would be misunderstood; we say that we preach and hear christian duty — the great duty of love to God and man. Let it be remembered, that this name is given to our preaching, not by those who hear it; not by those who have the means of knowing what it is; it is given by those who do not hear it; who are not willing that others should hear it; and who, if they did hear it, would listen with a jealous suspicion, which would prevent their judging impartially. Those who come, will find that we preach all the duties of the gospel, and all the doctrines of the gospel; not certainly all the doctrines which others find in the gospel; for unless *we* find them there, no man can undertake to say that it is our duty to preach them. We do not say that we preach morality; because, true as it is, it has given a wrong impression; but that wrong impression has not been made by our preaching, nor by any name applied to it by ourselves.

It is probable however, that others, when they give this name to our preaching, mean that we do not attempt to inspire religious feeling; that we lay all stress on religious conduct, without regard to religious affections. Let them come, and they will see that this charge cannot possibly be true; for we hold that there can be no such thing as consistently religious conduct without religious feeling; that the religious conduct will be earnest and devoted, in exact proportion as the religious feeling grows fervent and high; and therefore we labor to inspire religious affections, because without them, men can never be what christianity was meant to make them. But we urge men to cherish such feelings as are constant and self-sustained, and not to rely upon rising and falling emotions. We desire to see these affections appear not in sudden and momentary flashes, but burning with the steady brightness of a lamp to the feet. There may be some, who fear lest religious feeling shall run into excess. It is not so with us; we know, that there can be no excess in true religious feeling; however fast, however far it goes, it will confine itself to the straight and narrow path of duty. When we dwell on the unbounded love of God — a love, which all the thanklessness of man has never chilled; on the glorious self-devotion of his Son, whose love was stronger than death, for those who were no friends to him; when we remember all that their unrequited love has done for our happiness, for our improvement and salvation, we trust that some answering chord of gratitude is struck, some feeling is excited in every heart that is not stone.

But it is so manifestly impossible for any religion to

exist without religious feeling, that when they charge us with preaching morality only, they may mean that we do not insist upon the duty of devotion. Let them come and see. They will find that we represent prayer as the breath of life to the christian; that the child can as well say that he loves his parent while he always shuns his presence, as the christian profess to be faithful without communion with God. They will find that we urge upon all men the duty of prayer in the sanctuary, of prayer in retirement, of prayer at the family altar; and those who do not pray, cannot say that our faith allows, excuses, or defends their neglect of duty. It is true, that we do not consider all prayer as devotion; we think that prayer should be fervent rather than long, and that devotion should be calmly breathed from the depths of the soul. It is true, that we have little confidence in the piety of those who neglect their active duties for the sake of multiplied devotions, for such incense is not acceptable to the Most High; but if any think that we do not teach and impress the duty of prayer, let them come and see that however it may be with ourselves, our faith is not wanting; it insists on holy lips and holy lives; but it judges of the devotion by the life rather than of the life by the devotion.

They say that we make light of sin and of the change which christianity requires. Do we indeed deny the depravity of man? Let them come and see if it is so. They will find that we represent the world as sunk in wickedness; the hearts of the guilty are steeped in it, and we find its defacing stains in the best human hearts; we behold the great family of man in a state which is awful to every one who cares for the welfare

of his race — a state which would fill the heart with despair, were it not for the power of christianity. No one can think of the great world, trodden with armies, ground by oppression, darkened with ignorance and red with sin; no one can think of any single heart whose best purposes are so often overborne by temptation, whose best thoughts find it so hard to struggle upwards into life and action, without the conviction that 'if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves;' and every christian thinks with sorrow and shame of his own transgressions, his thoughtlessness, his indifference to eternity, and his ingratitude to God. Such is the state of man. But what are we to do? Are we to sit down to inquire how and whence this depravity came, or are we to arise and endeavor to remove it? When we see the conflagration spreading from house to house, and from street to street, are we to inquire how and by whom it was kindled, or should we exert ourselves to extinguish it? The gospel contains the injunction of our duty. It tells but incidentally, how and whence this depravity came, while it tells us plainly, repeatedly, and as if it were its main object to tell us, how it may be done away. All this is confirmed by our Saviour's example, he did not give his hearers the history of sin; he was too diligently employed in taking away the sin of the world.

Having this mistaken impression that we make light of sin, it is but natural for them to suppose that we are not aware of the greatness of the change necessary to bring men to the holiness of the gospel. Let them come and see. They will find that we represent that change as so great that it is compared in Scripture to

a new birth; instead of being called a change in the life, it is spoken of as beginning life anew. When one who has been guilty, repents, and is renewed in the spirit of his mind; when one who has never heard of Christ, listens to the glad tidings of salvation at last, and welcomes the sound with rapture to his heart; when the child with the dew of his youth still upon him, begins to think deeply and seriously of God,—each begins life anew; it is the greatest of all possible changes; it is passing from a life which ends at the grave to one that never ends: it is as if the corruptible were already putting on incorruption, and the mortal, immortality. When the heart has been long and firmly bound to the world, the conversion will generally be sudden; the bands of sin must be cut asunder at a blow; there is no hope of him who trifles, delays, and falters. But whether the conversion is sudden or slow, it is only a beginning; it does not bring them at once to the perfect stature of the christian, and if they count themselves to have attained, they are in danger of presumption. When the good seed has been sown in ground fitted to receive it, 'first appears the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear;' in all husbandry, a long season of patient industry must pass before the harvest is gathered in; the plants which spring up to their full growth rapidly will wither because they have no depth of earth, while those which are cultivated aright will keep growing till the harvest, which is the end of the world, and the reapers of which are the angels.

Those who come will find that we consider it essential to pass through the change of heart and life which

makes one a christian: No one believes that we are born holy; no one thinks that any human being comes into life with the christian character formed. We are born into an animal life, where the influences that act upon us are those of the senses and psssions. Christianity would have us born anew into a spiritual life, that we may live, not according to the flesh and its impulses, but according to the affections and principles of that religion which teaches us that we are immortal. The human heart resembles the soil of the garden; if it is cultivated, it will reward the hand of labor with its harvest of fruits and flowers; if neglected, it will be covered with useless, and perhaps with poisonous verdure. So the heart cannot be left to itself; the same neglect which would change the paradise into a desert, would assuredly make the heart of man a waste and desolate ruin. It was never meant to be left to itself; it is made over in childhood to the care of parents that they may be the means under God of giving this spiritual life to their children; but till the religious character is formed in young or old, they are children of the world — with hopes and feelings which never look beyond the world. Since it is the object of christianity to make us feel and act as children of God, and this change cannot begin too soon, God has called us early, and early should we seek his face. He has ordained that those to whom the child is indebted for life should be the parents of his immortal life also. When he wonders why they bow with reverence before a presence which he cannot see; and they give him the first knowledge of his heavenly Father; when they lead him to sweet and sacred thoughtfulness by

the simple story or the plaintive hymn; then perhaps that change is beginning which will make him a Christian in this life and number him with the blessed in another: they may not observe his progress, but it may result in that conversion which the gospel regards as the beginning of the christian life in the soul.

Those who come, may find that we consider the change itself the important thing; and therefore regard, less perhaps than some other sects, the accidental circumstances that may have attended it. The great question is, has the heart been turned to God? if so, we care less for an answer to the question, when and where was it so converted? It is a momentous thing to ascertain whether this change has taken place in the soul; and the scripture has left no uncertainty in a matter of so great importance. It teaches us that 'every one that doeth righteousness is born of God;' and by this it means, not the righteousness of a heathen nor a Jew, but the righteousness of a sincere and heavenly minded Christian. If we see a man whose life and conversation declare that he holds communion with God and finds pleasure in the acts and inspirations of devotion; whose light shines round, in his kindness to the miserable, his sympathy with the happy, and the benevolence which he feels for all; if we see him consistent in his righteousness, and faithful through all the joys and sorrows of his life, we have no need to ask farther questions; we have no doubt that his heart is turned to God; we should no more deny him to be a Christian, because he could not tell the precise moment of his conversion, than we should deny him to be a

human being, because he could not tell when and where he was born.

Another charge against our sentiments is, that they encourage men to believe that they can be saved by their own merits and works alone. This is never said by any who have heard our preaching or read our writings with candor; if there are any who believe it, let them come and see if any such doctrine is taught by those who profess our opinions. They will find that our belief on the subject is precisely the same with that expressed in the words, 'By grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.' We are not so unacquainted with human nature; we are not such strangers to human sin; we are not so ignorant of our own unworthiness, as to use such a word as human merit in the presence of God. We know that salvation is absolutely and entirely a gift of love; the world had done nothing to deserve it; it is a gift infinitely transcending the loftiest deserving of man. So far from holding this belief ourselves, we do not believe it possible that any man in his right mind ever regarded everlasting happiness as nothing more than the just and reasonable reward of human merit and exertion; it is against nature; if any are charged with it, they must be misunderstood. But whatever others believe, our faith on this subject is, that man is entirely indebted for salvation to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ his Son; to this, and to this alone.

But they say, we preach that a man must work out his own salvation. That same doctrine was preached before we preached it, by one who certainly was well acquainted with the doctrines and duties of christianity. But let them come and see what is meant by it; it is a

scripture phrase, and before they say that we use it improperly, let them listen to our explanation. Subsistence is the gift of God, but man must work out his own subsistence; he must prepare the ground, he must sow the seed, he must gather the harvest. But does he conceive himself less indebted to the kindness of his God? Does he think that if bread was supplied to him so that he need not labor at all, it would be better for his health, for his character, for his improvement? So far from it, he knows that it is the kindness of God which imposes the necessity of labor upon him, and that it is done for his own good. In the same manner and for the same reason, God has required men to labor for their own salvation; they must inquire into the nature, study the language, acquire the habits, and form the character suited to that heavenly country to which they hope to go. They must make that preparation to enjoy it, without which, the gift would lose its value. That God has imposed this necessity on man, so far from lessening our gratitude for his goodness, only makes us feel yet more deeply, that salvation is a gift of glorious and unbounded love.

But they ask if we say that men are not unprofitable servants. They are not profitable to God as one man can be profitable to another, but they may be profitable to themselves. 'Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? What can he gain by the best obedience of man? But it must be remembered that to be unprofitable is one thing, and to be unfaithful is another; and we cannot allow that because our obedience is unprofitable to God, it is a matter of small importance whether or not we are faithful in duty. We may resort to the beautiful illustration which unlocks

all the mysteries of the gospel, we may ask if a child's fidelity to his parent's instruction, can ever repay the debt of gratitude he owes for a parent's love? can the child say, that by obedience he has discharged his obligations for that love which watched for him when he was sleeping, which his coldness and ingratitude could never alter? No! though his obedience is not profitable to his father, it is the best proof he can give of his grateful affection; without it he is worthless; though his best obedience, so far from giving him a claim to new rewards, does not repay what he has received from his father's hands. So it is with the children of God. Important as their obedience is, we do not believe that it discharges the debt of gratitude which they already owe; still less do we believe that they can establish upon it any farther claim to his favors or rewards.

But they say that we do not speak of works as they are spoken of in the scriptures. Let them come and see. The scriptures do indeed speak slightingly of *works;* but we have never seen the passage where they speak thus of *good works.* The works which they condemned were the fasts, ceremonies, and sacrifices, which many of the Jews relied upon, even after they had become Christians; they answered precisely to the works by which some mistaken Christians at the present day, hope, without obedience, to gain the favor of God. By such works of hollow and formal sanctity — works not done from any religious feeling, — no flesh could be justified. But the language used respecting good works was very different; it was the design of christianity to make men 'zealous of good works;' our

Saviour charged his disciples to let men see their good works, in order to induce them to glorify the heavenly Father. This distinction has not been properly regarded; we endeavor to regard it; we remember how sternly it was said, 'your new moons, your calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting; on such works we counsel none to rely; but we remember that it was said at the same time, 'put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well.' These good works we earnestly recommend and enjoin, not because they can merit salvation — not because they can establish a claim on the Most High; but because we are told that they who love the Father will keep his commands; and these good works are important, because they are the only substantial proof we can give of our love to God.

There is yet another charge — they say that we remove all fears of the future; let them come and see if it is so. We certainly endeavor to move men by dwelling on the goodness of God, because it is that goodness, which, we are assured, 'leadeth to repentance.' We use persuasive rather than alarming language, because we do not wish to see men starting up in sudden fright, as if awakened by the midnight fire-bell; and herein we follow the example of him who said, 'knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men; it is not because we believe that there are no terrors, but because we think it better to draw men to obedience with bands of love. If we went so far as to deny that men have any need to fear, there would be more reason for the charge; but it is not so; we see and lament the freedom from uneasiness which every where prevails; every where we say, because we do

not admit the genuineness of that earnestness which is lighted by the flame of party; we shall therefore still endeavor to win men to Christ by the persuasion of gentleness and love.

But this is not all; they think we teach that no man has anything to fear in the future world; in other words, that all will be happy as soon as they pass over the boundary of the grave. If we believed that doctrine we should avow it; but there is no shadow of reason for saying that we believe it, except that we do not say that those who believe it are not Christians. Their opinions are their own; we are to answer only for ours. But we do not agree in any single point of doctrine with those who teach that all the suffering occasioned by sin ends in the present world. We think that when a man enters another life, he enters it in the state of moral improvement or moral guilt, in which he departed from this world. We know of no pleasures there which the guilty can enjoy; we know of nothing there which can drown the feeling of uneasiness and pain; we know of no sleep in which they can forget their sorrows; therefore we think they must be miserable, unless they are greatly changed by passing through the grave. Of such a change we see no intimation — no evidence whatever. They will leave their bodies in the grave, but their sins must go with them, because their sins are in the soul; the body can no more sin than any other clay; it is the soul which sins, and which must suffer if it is guilty. We reproach no other sect when we say that we believe that the judgment is not here, but after death; there, every man shall receive according to his deeds — they that

have done good shall come to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of despair.

But they say that if we believe not this, we believe in the final restoration of all to heaven; that if there is suffering in the future world, it will have an end at last. Let them come and see. If we believed that doctrine we should declare it, for we have never learned to be ashamed of any sincere convictions. But we do not believe in the restoration of all the guilty, because we do not find it taught in the scriptures. If we considered the punishment inflicted by God, we might believe that it would pass away; but we regard it as self-inflicted; men are free both in choice and action, and they bring this misery on themselves against the counsel and warning of God. We believe it to be the unalterable order of nature that happiness shall be produced by goodness, and that misery shall follow sin. These consequences are before us; if we choose to sin, we choose to suffer. When a child is told by his father that if he does wrong he will suffer, he has no right to say that his father inflicts the punishment which he suffers; nor do we believe that the punishment of sin is any more directly inflicted by our God.

Men can never, in this world or another, be happy without being good. We do not say that all men will not be finally happy, but we find no assurance that they will. This, however, is a subject on which we do not enlarge; we leave it where the gospel left it; we do not try to lift the awful, deep and heavy veil which hangs over the eternal world. We use the words of scripture; we dictate to no one what meaning he shall give them; we leave all to the Most High, knowing that the guilty will suffer all that is just and nothing

more than is just; we consider it our duty rather to warn men to fly from the wrath to come.

Such are some of the points in which we have been misunderstood. When there are so many proofs that we have been misunderstood, we call upon other Christians to come and see, that they may not so mistake us. We think it is but a reasonable demand. It was said even before the prejudiced Hebrew council, 'Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?' let the candor of the Christian be at least equal to that of the Jew. We cannot trust the report of anything which we hear, after it has passed through the lips of one or two; how then is it possible to judge fairly by report, of the opinions of a religious party?

We lament that we must use that word religious party; we lament that Christians should be armed against each other; but we can see no end to disunion, till all admit that men are answerable for their sentiments to God and to God alone. We should make it our endeavor to know the truth — not what others say is truth, but what we find is truth in the scriptures; and we should hold ourselves ready at any moment to give up our present sentiments, if we find that the scripture does not sustain them. We would endeavor to keep an open heart; and if there are any opinions which bring better evidence than ours — any, that have a stronger tendency to produce true love to God and man — any that have more power to make bad men good and good men better — then may our system perish, whatever feelings may be wounded by its fall! may all the pages in which it is engrossed be scattered to the winds of heaven! may every vestige of it sink, and be found no more forever!